

**REMARKS**

The Office Action mailed April 21, 2004 has been reviewed and the comments of the Patent and Trademark Office have been considered. Claims 1-20 were pending in the application. The existing claims 1-20 have been cancelled and replaced by new claims 21-25. Therefore, claims 21-25 are pending in the application and are submitted for reconsideration.

In reply to the issues raised in paragraph 1 of the Office Action, a new title has been presented to be more clearly indicative of the claimed invention. No new matter has been added.

In reply to the objection to the drawings in paragraphs 2 and 3, applicants believe that the pending claims address the issues raised in these paragraphs. Therefore, the drawings are believed to be unobjectionable.

This amendment adds and deletes claims in this application. A detailed listing of all claims that are, or were, in the application, irrespective of whether the claim(s) remain under examination in the application, are presented, with an appropriate defined status identifier.

In the Office Action, claims 1-3, 5, 6, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, and 18 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. patent 5,859,711 to Barry (hereafter "Barry") in view of Japanese patent document no. 10126547 to Sumita (hereafter "JP '547"). Claims 4, 9, 10, 13, and 16 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Barry in view of JP '547, in further view of U.S. patent application 2001/0048533 to Koana (hereafter "Koana"). Claims 7, 8, 19, and 20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Barry in view of JP '547, in further view of U.S. patent 6,041,200 to Glass (hereafter "Glass"). Claims 1-20 have been canceled, making rejection of these claims moot. These rejections are traversed insofar as they may be applied to the pending claims.

Independent claims 21, 23, and 25 recite, *inter alia*, a system and method by which a control unit or means distributes to-be-printed pages and estimates a time needed for distributive printing, based on printing speeds of available output apparatuses, in units of groups, where each group includes (1) a plurality of page images, if a setting for printing a plurality of page images on a sheet of paper is included, or (2) two page images a setting for double-side printing is included, or (3) single page images if neither of the above settings is included. These recited features are supported at least at Fig. 9 and its description in the text

of the specification. These recited features are not disclosed or suggested by the applied prior art and, therefore, claims 21, 23, and 25 are believed to be patentable over the prior art.

Independent claims 22 and 24 recite, *inter alia*, a control means or method that confirms whether staple-printing is set in the print job and then confirms whether high-speed printing is set in the print job. If so, the control means or method cancels the staple-printing for that print job and distributes the image outputs to one or more output apparatuses which are in a printable state. This provides the advantage that high speed printing is best achieved for the print job. These recited features are disclosed in Fig. 10 and its description in the text of the specification. These recited features are not disclosed or suggested by the prior art and, therefore, claims 22 and 24 are believed to be patentable over the applied prior art.

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, applicants respectfully submit that the application is now in condition for allowance. An indication of the same is respectfully requested. If there are any questions regarding the application, or if an examiner's amendment would facilitate the allowance of one or more of the claims, the examiner is invited to contact the undersigned attorney at the local telephone number below.

Should additional fees be necessary in connection with the filing of this paper, or if a petition for extension of time is required for timely acceptance of same, the Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge deposit account No. 19-0741 for any such fees; and applicants hereby petition for any needed extension of time.

Respectfully submitted,

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FOLEY & LARDNER LLP

**Customer Number: 22428**

Telephone: (202) 672-5414

Facsimile: (202) 672-5399

By

Aaron C. Chatterjee

Pavan K. Agarwal

Registration No. 40,888

Aaron C. Chatterjee

Registration No. 41,398

Attorneys for Applicants